

The Privilege of Service; An Analysis of Current Active Duty and Reserve Military Neurosurgeons

Richard Menger MD MPA^{1,1}, Benjamin F Mundell PhD², Will Robbins MD,³ Peter Letarte MD Randy Bell MD,⁴ in conjunction with Council of State Neurosurgical Societies (CSNS) and AANS/CNS Joint Committee of Military Neurosurgeons

¹ Department of Neurosurgery, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, Shreveport LA

² Mayo Clinic School of Medicine, Rochester MN

³ Attending, Neurosurgery, Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton OH

⁴ Associate Professor of Surgery, Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, Bethesda MD

Introduction

Papers from 2002-2017 have highlighted consistent unique socioeconomic challenges facing military neurosurgeons. Here we focus on the reserve military neurosurgeon who carries the dual mission with both civilian and military responsibilities.

Methods

Survey solicitation of current active duty and reserve military neurosurgeons was performed via the AANS/CNS Joint Committee of Military Neurosurgeons and the CSNS. Demographic, qualitative, and quantitative data points were compared between reserve and active duty military neurosurgeons. Civilian neurosurgical provider data was taken from the 2016 NERVES Socio-economic Survey.

Results

75% (12/16) of current reserve neurosurgeons are pleased with their military service with feelings of patriotism (86.7%), development of camaraderie (66.7%), and a specific pride in taking care of the military patients (93.8%). Reserve neurosurgeons make significant contributions to the military's neurosurgical capabilities with 75% (12/16) having deployed during their career. Of those who deployed, 91.7% (11/12) found the experience rewarding.

Economic modeling was done to forecast the impact of deployment or mobilization on the reserve neurosurgeon, neurosurgery practice, and the community. Based on survey information, during a neurosurgeon's reserve career he or she has a 75% chance of deploying. This risk is also borne by the practices, hospitals, and communities the neurosurgeon serves in civilian practice. This can result in less new patient encounters, decreased collections, decreased wRVU generation, increased operating costs per neurosurgeon, and intangible limitations on practice development. However, through our modeling we have illustrated that reserve physicians joining a larger group practice can significantly mitigate this risk. What remains astonishing is that 91.7% of those reserve neurosurgeons who deployed noted the experience to be rewarding despite, on average, seeing a 35% reduction in income during the fiscal year of a six month deployment.

Conclusions

This is the first study directly survey and evaluate socioeconomic data from the current body of military neurosurgeons. Reserve neurosurgeons make substantial contributions to the military's neurosurgical capabilities with the overwhelming majority of current military reservists having deployed or mobilized during their reserve commitments. Despite a 35% reduction in income during the year of a six month military deployment, 91.7% of reserve military neurosurgeons viewed their deployment experience positively. By our modeling, the impact of deployment on the military neurosurgeon, neurosurgeon's practice, and the local community can be significantly mitigated by a larger practice environment. Furthermore, illustrating their dual mission as civilian and military clinicians, 92.8% desired a more flexible military reserve drill schedule with more programs sensitive to the needs of practicing physicians.